



Being social: Missing prerequisites for online engagement, exchange and inclusion.

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Abstract

Despite cautionary analyses and critiques by some scholars, cyberoptimism and what Steve Woolgar calls *cyberbole* continue to characterise much discussion of social media in the context of democratic politics (*e-democracy*) and citizen engagement and participation, and is evident in claims of emergence of the ‘social organisation’ and ‘social business’. This paper synthesises the findings of three recent research studies, which show that the allegedly democratising social interaction and dialogic affordances of Web 2.0 are not being realised in many applications. Key missing prerequisites for engagement, exchange and inclusion are identified and highlighted as issues for attention in research and practice.

Keywords: New media, social media, interactivity, dialogue, engagement, listening

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Introduction

Since Negroponte's (1996) celebration of 'being digital', focus has turned to the *social* in the description and operations of media, networks and business, as digitisation becomes pervasive in the twenty-first century. It can be argued that digital technologies are beginning to "withdraw into the woodwork" rather than being seen as "sublime icons of mythology", as Vincent Mosco predicted (2004: 6, 19). However, so-called social media and social networks, which in turn have spawned concepts such as *e-democracy* (Carpentier, 2011), the "social organisation" (Bradley and McDonald, 2011) and the "social business" (IBM, 2011), have continued to attract "celebrants" (Mansell, 2012; McChesney 2013), *cyberoptimism*, *techno-utopianism* (DeLuca, Lawson and Sun, 2012), and what Steve Woolgar (2002) calls *cyberhole*.

This paper, while recognising the affordances and potentialities of interactive social media and social networks (Flew, 2014; Jenkins, 2006; Macnamara, 2014; Siaper, 2012), presents empirical data and critical analysis that brings into question whether social media are being used *socially* for engagement, exchange and inclusion and draws attention to two key prerequisites for the potentialities of Web 2.0 to be realised.

The polarised but largely optimistic literature on 'new media'

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (2010: 61). This definition usefully draws attention away from focus on the technological dimension of so-called 'new media', which leads to the pitfalls of technological determinism (Deibert, 1997; Lievrouw, 2002) and the "discourse of novelty" (Carpentier and de Cleen, 2008: 7), to recognise the social, cultural and political context of these media and resulting media practices of production and consumption (Couldry, 2004) – in short, how people use these media.

The pioneers of the World Wide Web, particularly what is referred to as Web 2.0 which enables social media, as well as researchers refer to the “philosophy”, “principles”, “protocols” and “culture” related to this rapidly growing media environment (Jenkins, 2006; Merholz, 2005; O’Reilly, 2005). For instance, Boler notes that the founder of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, said the Web was designed for “shared creativity” and was never intended to be about delivering content to passive audiences (2008: 39), as mass media mostly do. While early uses of the Web did mostly feature static content and one-way information transmission, referred to as Web 1.0 (Vergeer, 2013), the term ‘Web 2.0’ was coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2004 to distinguish Web-based services that feature openness for interactivity, participation and collaboration (Boler, 2008: 39; O’Reilly, 2005). In his popular text, *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins emphasised that Web 2.0 is about culture more than technology and, in particular, “participatory culture” (2006: 243). Harrison and Barthel state that “Web 2.0 is founded on a radical reconceptualisation of the user, from consumer of online products and information ... to producer of online products and information that they share with others” (2009: 160).

Interactivity, which is the key affordance of Web 2.0-based social media that enables inclusion and exchange through dialogue, participation and collaboration, is also emphasised by Bucy (2004) and Cover (2004) – although interactivity is understood in varying ways and needs clarification. McMillan identifies three levels of interactivity, which she describes as “user-to-system”, “user-to-documents” and “user-to-user” interactivity (2002: 166–72). In this typology, the first level relates to the Human Computer Interface (HCI) and interactions such as clicking on menus and icons to select content, which Carpentier refers to as “person-to-machine” interactivity (2007: 221). McMillan emphasises the higher levels of “user-to-documents” and particularly “user-to-user” interactivity, as does Stromer-Galley in discussing “human-interactive features” in political communication (2000: 111). In examining youth engagement online, Xenos et al. note that “Web 2.0 functionalities” and “the unique properties of social media” overcome key limitations of Web 1.0 and facilitate participation (2014: 154). Sundar and colleagues identify two types of interactivity afforded by Web sites: (1) *functional interactivity* based on Web site functions that provide opportunities for autonomous user interaction such as choosing different modalities for accessing content (e.g., text, audio, video) and making comments in comment boxes (Sundar, 2007), and (2) *contingent interactivity* which involves reciprocity in sending and receiving messages, so-named because such interactive exchanges are contingent on the content under discussion and messages sent (Sundar et al., 2003). Guillory and Sundar (2014) report from

their research of organisation Web sites that the experiences and perceptions of users are enhanced by both functional interactivity, which is similar to what Carpentier calls “person-to-machine” interactivity and McMillan calls “user-to-system” and “user-to-documents” interactivity, as well as contingent interactivity – “person-to-person” or “user-to-user” in Carpentier’s and McMillan’s terms. Nevertheless, there is general agreement among researchers that the higher levels of interactivity in which users can interact and engage in dialogue, collaboration and content creation (i.e., production), rather than selection and consumption of predetermined content, are the key affordances that characterise social media and enhance inclusion, exchange and engagement.

While a number of early twenty-first century studies of the internet and the Web led to a challenging of “mid-1990s utopianism” (Benkler, 2006: 260), *cyberoptimism*, *techno-utopianism* (DeLuca et al., 2012) and what Woolgar (2002) calls *cyberbole*, and propagated *cyberpessimism* and even a “narrative of despair” in some instances (Bennett, 2008: 4), transformist views have continued to abound in relation to the Web and social media in particular. Notwithstanding continuing concern about a ‘digital divide’, which is now perceived as cultural, political and socioeconomic rather than technological (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001; Jenkins, 2006), a preponderance of ‘lurking’ rather than active participation online (Nielson, 2006), use of the internet for entertainment more than information seeking or civic participation (Fenton, 2012; Papacharissi, 2007, 2011), and political economy warnings of colonisation of the Web (Curran et al., 2012; McChesney, 2013), social media are perceived as having the potential to redress the “democratic deficit” (Couldry, 2010: 49; Curran, 2011: 86) and revitalise the public sphere, transform business (Bradley and McDonald, 2011; IBM, 2011) and enhance organisation-public relations (Breakenridge, 2008; Hazelton et al., 2008; Solis and Breakenridge, 2009).

For example, in a political context Corner says that many see the internet, particularly Web 2.0 communication, “bypassing ... the degraded central systems of mediation in favour of a more independent, varied and critical range of resources for political knowledge” (2007: 223). Siapera says social media are facilitating a “democratization” of media (2012: 55) leading to increased access to tools of public communication (i.e., inclusion) and increased social interaction and participation.

Hazelton et al. claim that public relations – i.e., relations between public and private sector organisations and their ‘publics’ – is “undergoing a revolution” because of social media

(2008: 91). In the foreword to Breakenridge's (2008) book *PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences*, social media advocate Brian Solis effuses: "Welcome to what just may be the greatest evolution in the history of PR" (Solis, 2008: xvii). He claims that with the shift to social media "monologue has given way to dialogue" (xviii). In the title of another book, Solis and Breakenridge (2009) claim that Web 2.0 is "putting the public back in public relations". Similarly, in the latest edition of *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, Cornelissen states that social media "create new ways of reaching and engaging with stakeholders". He adds that the development of new media "provides an organisation with the opportunity to engage in conversations and to tell and elaborate its story or key message to stakeholders or the general public in an interactive way" (2011: 154). Similarly, Duhé and Wright (2013) claim that social media provide opportunities for stakeholders to engage in discussions on participative platforms that open up new opportunities for dialogue, and in a recent analysis of the "new media ecology" and social media use by PR practitioners in the US and Europe, Swerling et al. claim that "it is now generally recognised that we are undergoing a major transformation to a new era for communication, one in which transparency and actual dialogue with stakeholders play key roles" (2014: 4).

In 2011, IBM declared itself a social business, stating that a "tectonic shift in the marketplace occurred" in the previous decade and noted that "instead of simply pushing messages and offers out to the market, marketing is engaging customers through open dialogue integrated with rich media capabilities that cater to customers' preferences, buying patterns and personal networks" (IBM, 2011: 2, 5). The global business consulting firm Gartner has published a book titled *The Social Organisation: How to Use Social Media to Tap the Collective Genius of Your Customers and Employees* (Bradley and McDonald, 2011). In a survey report titled 'Evolution of the Networked Enterprise', McKinsey reports that 83 per cent of companies use at least one social media technology and that social media use is now a mainstream part of corporate practice (McKinsey, 2013: para. 1).

Theoretical frameworks informing social media analysis

Beyond new media research, analysis of social media is informed by the broad field of communication theory, particularly streams related to dialogue and voice, as well as social theory, democratic political theory and public relations theory. The importance of dialogue, rather than one-way monologic interaction, and of openness for listening as well as participation and collaboration, is grounded in the seminal work of Bakhtin (1981, 1990),

Buber (1958, 2002) and Gadamer (1989), as well as contemporary scholarship such as that of Baxter (2011) and Carey (2009).

In studies of democratic political participation, Bimber et al. (2013), Coleman (2013), Dahlgren (2009) and others have illustrated the vital role of dialogue and participation. In *Why Voice Matters*, Couldry (2010) emphasises the social equity as well as political significance of people having a voice, and in other work he describes speaking and listening as “implicitly linked practices” (2009: 580). However, Bickford (1996) was one of the first to point out a lack of attention to listening in discussion of voice and dialogue and her work, and recent research such as that of Couldry (2010, 2012), Dreher (2009, 2012) and Husband (1996, 2009), raises major questions about listening, which is identified as essential to give voice value. This, as well as communication theories and specific theories related to voice and dialogue, are particularly relevant to this analysis.

In addition, contemporary public relations theory has identified dialogue as an essential element of positive organisation-public relationships (Kent and Taylor, 2002) and two-way dialogic if not *symmetrical* interaction is now generally accepted as part of Excellence theory of public relations (Botan and Hazelton, 2006; Toth, 2007).

But despite a body of research emphasising the importance of openness and interactivity for dialogue, participation and engagement, and rampant optimism such as that cited in the previous section, there are signs that social media are not living up to the transformist promises proffered by optimists. For example, despite much being made of social media use in the Obama 2008 and 2012 US presidential election campaigns, a Pew Research Center report was sub-titled ‘Obama Leads But Neither Candidate Engages in Much Dialogue with Voters’ (Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 2012) and commented that “rarely did either candidate reply to, comment on, or ‘retweet’ something from a citizen – or anyone else outside the campaign” (Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 2012: 3). Crawford has reported that during the times of heaviest use of digital technologies, the Obama Online Operation “did not reply to followers, or indicate that direct messages were being heard” (2009: 530). Similarly, studies of the much-vaunted use of social media for citizen engagement in UK election campaigns (e.g., Gibson et al., 2010; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2011) and Australian federal elections (e.g., Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Macnamara and Kenning, 2011) have not produced evidence of any substantial dialogue or increased citizen engagement through social media. Rather, numerous research studies have reported use of social media for one-way transmission of political and

organisational messages. A recent review by Vergeer concluded that the conduct of election campaigns “has not changed drastically” (2013: 10).

More broadly, despite claims of a shift to ‘social businesses’ and ‘social organisations’, allegedly interacting, engaging and collaborating with stakeholders, studies show that the reality is mostly a case of ‘business as usual’. While conducted a few years ago, a review of 10 years of discussion of use of the internet for dialogic communication by McAllister-Spooner reported that “organisations do not seem to be fully utilising the interactive potential of the internet to build and maintain organisation-public relationships” (2009: 320). While not specifically examining interactivity, dialogue and two-way interaction, a longitudinal study of organisational social media use over six years from 2006 to 2012 by Wright and Hinson reported a focus on one-way dissemination of messages (Wright and Hinson, 2012: 1). More specifically in terms of the focus of this discussion, a comparative analysis of 78 Web sites of corporations and non-profit organisations in Singapore (51 per cent) and globally (49 per cent) conducted in 2004 and again in 2009 by Sriramesh et al. found that, despite rapid increases in the availability of communication channels that enable two-way interaction during that period, “both corporations and non-profit organisations mostly utilised their Web sites as information dissemination tools, where the information flow is one-way” (2011: 134). A 2012 qualitative study of social media use by PR practitioners in Australia by Robson and James concluded:

All participants understood the rules and ideals around social media (authenticity, interactivity, two-way communication, etc.) but they are not necessarily adopting them in their practice. The interviewees primarily used social media platforms, or believed they are best for, one-way communication and message dissemination (2013: 6).

In the US, Kent has concluded: “If we look at the use of social media by most large corporations, we see that the communication tools that were invented for ‘sociality’ are typically used in a one-way fashion to push messages out to publics” (2013: 342).

Hence, based on these and other studies, one has to greet claims of interactivity and participation afforded through social media leading to increased inclusion, engagement and exchange with some caution and even cynicism. Nevertheless, noting that many of these forms of media are relatively new (Flew, 2014; Siapera, 2014), further ongoing research is

necessary to track how social media are used as digital media literacy and familiarisation with their unique characteristics increase.

Methodology

Research questions

Given the potential of interactive Web 2.0-based social media to enable dialogue, participation and collaboration, and the widespread claims that these affordances are being used and enhancing or even ‘revolutionising’ democratic politics and organisation-public relations, this analysis set out to address three research questions as follows:

RQ1: To what extent are social media being used interactively by organisations and public officials to engage with citizens and their stakeholders?

RQ2: Are social media increasing social interaction and engagement between organisations (public and private sector) and their stakeholders?

RQ3: What are the implications of current social media practices by organisations for social inclusion, participation and engagement?

Method

This paper synthesises the findings of three recent research studies, which explored the use of social media in the following contexts: (1) by companies and organisations claiming to use social media to engage with stakeholders; (2) the online campaigns of major political parties and politicians during the 2013 Australian federal election; and (3) an ongoing study of organisational listening. These studies involve a mix of quantitative and qualitative research and traverse a range of organisations and public officials including companies, government departments and agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs), political parties and elected political representatives.

The first study was based on a survey of senior communication and PR managers in private and public sector organisations in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Singapore (n = 221) conducted in 2011–2012. The sample was obtained from the membership lists of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), the Hong Kong PR Professionals Association (HKPRPA), the Institute of Public

Relations of Singapore (IPRS) and the International Society of Business Communicators (IABC). The survey was administered online using SurveyMonkey Professional. Descriptive statistical analysis of survey data was undertaken using SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

The second study involved quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the blogs and social media sites of the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party of Australia, and 191 politicians standing for re-election in 2013 (35 sitting members of the 150-member House of Representatives and the 76-member Senate in the Australian Parliament were not standing for re-election). As well as blogs, sites examined included official accounts and pages on the leading microblogging application Twitter, the leading social network Facebook, the video sharing sites YouTube and Vimeo, and the leading photo sharing site Flickr. Quantitative analysis was undertaken based on counts entered into Excel and using NVivo Ncapture to import metadata of social media accounts (i.e., number of 'likes', 'followers', etc). Qualitative text/content analysis of content such as tweets on Twitter was conducted using NVivo 10 where they were coded into a number of categories including 'broadcasts' and 'responses or direct messages' and by topic or theme such as 'policy announcement', 'campaign slogan', 'attacking opponents' and 'whereabouts reports'.

Thirdly, this paper reports the findings from a pilot study in an ongoing research project examining organisational listening.¹ This qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews with senior organisation management as well as content analysis of relevant documents such as communication and marketing plans, reports, evaluation metrics, staff job descriptions and roles, and communication channels such as Web sites and social media such as blogs, microblogging accounts, Facebook pages and so on. The pilot study involved three organisations only – a large information technology corporation, a small-to-medium (SME) service provider business and a public sector institution – but it signals some concerning realities for further investigation.

Findings

Web sites and social media of organisations, political parties and political representatives were found to overwhelmingly involve one-way transmission of information and messages to publics and stakeholders. In some cases, little evidence of interactivity and participation by other than the site owners was found. The third study reported here, in particular, indicates that the lack of interactive exchange and engagement (i.e., two-way communication) is not an

intentional strategy, or even a result of disinterest. To the contrary, many organisations have policies and a rhetoric of engagement and listening – one even referred to itself as “a listening organisation” (anon., personal communication, June 20, 2013).² However, when a number of citizens, customers and/or other stakeholders speak, as they increasingly do in social media, many organisations and public officials lack the resources, technologies and systems required for affording *attention*, *recognition*, *consideration*, *interpretation* to gain an *understanding* of others’ views, and *responding*, which are identified as key elements of listening (Honneth, 2007; Husband, 1996, 2000; Lundsteen, 1979; Purdy and Borisoff, 1997). (See ‘Organisational use of social media revisited’.)

1. Organisational use of social media

The survey of 221 organisations found that the main types of social media used are social networks, particularly Facebook, video sharing sites such as YouTube, microblogs particularly Twitter, blogs, and photo sharing sites, followed by other specialised sites such as LinkedIn. Wikis, podcasting and private social networks such as Yammer and SocialText were used by less than 10 per cent of organisations at the time of the survey. These findings are broadly consistent with those from US and European studies such as those of Wright and Hinson (2009) and Zerfass et al. (2010).

Monitoring of social media content is an essential component of interactivity, dialogue and engagement, as it only through regular monitoring that organisations are aware of who is speaking to or about them and able to respond. However, only 20 per cent of Asia Pacific organisations studied had tools or services to comprehensively monitor social media mentions of the organisation and relevant comments about its operations, products or services. A number of organisations monitor social media selectively or in an ad hoc way, but almost half of the organisations surveyed either did not monitor social media mentions at all or monitored sporadically.

It can be argued that, in addition to monitoring of social media, content analysis also should be undertaken to identify the issues and topics being discussed, sources quoted, and the theme and tone of comments. However, this study found that 36 per cent of Asia Pacific organisations were not analysing social media content at all and a further 22 per cent conducted quantitative analysis only, focused on volume of mentions, visits, views and other statistical metrics. Thus, almost 60 per cent of Asia Pacific organisations do not know what is being said to or about them in social media and, therefore, are unable to respond and engage

with user-generated content. Their use of social media was predominantly one-way transmission of organisation messages.

A further indication of the closed stance of organisations online was that “loss of control” over messages and image building was cited as the major challenge and risk in using social media, nominated by 58 per cent of practitioners. The problematic nature of control is widely discussed in communication and public relations literature. For instance, Jim and Larissa Grunig (2011: 47) as well as Fawkes and Gregory (2000: 122) have criticised the “illusion of control” that persists among many PR and corporate communication practitioners as well as senior management and restricts open dialogic approaches and engagement.

This study also found a lack of training of staff in social media use, a lack of governance, and a lack of resources for responding and engaging with user-generated comment online. The latter will be revisited in discussing the third study informing this analysis.

2. Political use of social media

The quantitative and qualitative study of social media use in the 2013 Australian federal election found that the volume of social media use has increased substantially over the years. Table 1 shows the growth in online applications and social media use by sitting Australian federal politicians during the 2007, 2010 and 2013 federal election campaigns. Most notably, 81 per cent of sitting members of parliament had either a Facebook profile or page, or both, and more than three-quarters (76 per cent) of the 191 sitting members studied had a Twitter account.

Table 1. Change in the number of politicians using various social media from 2007 to 2013.

Social media	2007	2010	2013	% change 2010–13	% change 2007–13
Personal Web site	137	157	174	11%	27%
Facebook	8	146	206	41%	2475%
Twitter	0	92	146	59%	*
YouTube	13	34	135	297%	938%
MySpace	26	9	25	178%	-4%
Blogs	15	29	45	55%	200%
Flickr	0	9	39	333%	*

E-surveys	24	7	48	586%	100%
E-petitions	10	3	20	567%	100%
E-newsletter	42	78	104	33%	148%
Total / average %	275	564	942	67%	243%

* Figures not available as no use was recorded in 2007.

However, coding of 1,455 tweets posted by the 10 most active politicians on Twitter during the three-week period of analysis revealed an overwhelming focus on broadcasting messages, rather than responding to others, answering questions and engaging in conversations. Analysis found 94.6 per cent of the tweets of the 10 most active politicians on Twitter were broadcasts, with just 5.4 per cent being direct messages or responses. Furthermore, while equating ‘following’ of others to listening is a basic metric, it is a somewhat useful indicator of listening and engagement, as the social media sites of politicians are usually operated not only by them personally, but by their campaign and electoral staff for market research and voter engagement. Crosstab analysis of the volume of tweets (speaking) with data on ‘followers’ and ‘following’ of others illustrates that high usage of social media does not necessarily equate to interaction, dialogue and citizen participation, with some of the most prolific tweeters not ‘following’ (and, therefore, not listening) in Twitter.

In terms of dialogue, conversation, responses, answering questions and listening to others’ comments – key affordances of social media – the 2013 Australian election was not only not an advancement, but it was a step backwards compared with 2010 when 47.5 per cent of tweets by the 10 most active politicians on Twitter were responses and direct messages to others and 52.5 per cent were broadcast messages. Interactivity on incumbent politicians’ and major political party blogs also declined in 2013 compared with 2010, with some containing no comments and some blogs, such as the official Labor Party blog, being closed down. While the volume of social media use by the politicians and the major political parties studied has increased by almost two and a half times since the 2007 election, political communication remains decidedly ‘politics 1.0’, confirming the findings from studies of the 2010 UK election (Gibson et al., 2010; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2011) and a number of other political campaigns.

3. Organisational use of social media revisited

An ongoing study of organisational listening has brought heightened focus to the challenges of operationalising interactivity for dialogue, engagement and participation. In

institutionalised societies, or what Couldry calls “complex societies” (2010: 100), citizens not only work in and are represented through organisations, but they need to interact on a daily basis with a plethora of organisations ranging from government departments and agencies and large corporations to various non-government organisations (NGOs), institutions such as police, hospitals, libraries and museums, associations, as well as local business, councils and so on. To be open, interactive and dialogic, such interactions require organisations to have the capacity for large-scale listening as well as large-scale public dissemination of information.

However, this research has found that the so-called ‘communication’ functions of organisations – public relations, organisational and corporate communication, and even customer relations in some cases – are primarily structured, resourced and focussed on doing the work of speaking on behalf of the organisation. Furthermore, organisations create a substantial *architecture for speaking* comprised of systems such as Web sites (i.e., Web 1.0), databases and mailing lists; technology such as Web programming, videoconferencing, data mining and presentation software; resources such as event management; and information production and distribution systems for speeches, reports, newsletters, brochures and other publications – not to mention multi-million advertising campaigns in many cases. Many government, corporate and institutional organisations spend seven-figure sums of money a year on resources and systems for speaking. Conversely, most do not have an *architecture of listening* or do the *work of listening*. Specifically, this research has found that:

1. Two out of the three organisations studied undertake market or reputation research, but this was clearly described in terms of how it informed the development of strategy to achieve organisational goals and objectives. In other words, it was instrumental and functionalist. This confirms the finding by Foreman-Wernet and Dervin in one of the few studies of organisational listening in PR literature, who concluded that “audience research in the arts is dominated by marketing-oriented surveys ... this work is primarily administrative in nature, geared toward mapping audiences as consumers so that audience size can be maintained or increased (2006: 288);
2. Social media were used by all three organisations studied, comprised of one corporate blog and three Twitter accounts, but these primarily involved one-way transmission of organisation messages, with the blog and one Twitter account managed by marketing to promote products. The Twitter accounts contained 98 per cent broadcast tweets compared with two per cent direct messages or responses to others;

3. The only other function consistent to all three organisations examined was traditional and social media monitoring, but this was focussed in all cases on tracking the organisations' messages as part of evaluating their PR and brand positioning, not as a listening mechanism; and
4. The only organisational function which seems to make any sustained effort to listen and respond directly to publics or stakeholders is customer relations. But this analysis indicated that customer relations is focussed largely on resolving particular problems and pacification to preserve revenue/customers/clients and protect the reputation of the organisation, rather than open listening.

While technologies can provide tools to aid listening, such as media and internet monitoring and text analysis software, the concept of an architecture of listening is not an argument for *technological determinism*. The term 'architecture of listening' is used in preference to Coleman's "technologies of hearing" because organisational listening has cultural, institutional, structural and political as well as technological components. Preliminary findings in this project suggest that an architecture of listening in organisations requires:

1. A *culture* that is open to listening as defined by Gadamer (1989), Honneth (2007), Husband (1996, 2009) and, most recently, Gregory (2014);
2. *Policies* that invite comment and discussion and allocate resources to listening as well as speaking;
3. *Systems* that are open and interactive, such as Web sites that allow visitors to post comments and questions, vote, and so on;
4. *Technological tools* to aid listening, such as monitoring tools or services, automated acknowledgement systems, text analysis software for sense-making when large volumes of discussion occurs, and even argumentation software to facilitate meaningful dialogue, consultation and debate;
5. *Human resources* (staff) assigned to operate listening systems and do the work of listening; and

6. *Articulation* of what the organisation ‘hears’ to policy-making and decision-making. While listening does not imply or require that every comment and suggestion should be acted on, unless there is a link to policy-making and decision-making for potential adoption the voice of those who speak to or about an organisation and its activities has no value – or, in Couldry’s terms, it does not matter.

Conclusion

This research suggests that Couldry’s claimed “crisis of voice” in contemporary societies (2009: 581) is better described as a crisis of listening. A lack of listening means that, even when citizens get to speak, their voice has little or no value, and promises of inclusion, engagement and participation are empty, and claims of being ‘social’ are hollow. This paper argues that organisations need to (1) be open to and embrace interactivity online which facilitates inclusion and enables dialogue, participation and collaboration, and (2) become effective at listening, which requires them to undertake the work of listening and, in the case of organisations with substantial numbers of stakeholders, establishing an architecture of listening – not simply investing in an architecture of speaking. These attributes are essential for ‘being social’ and creating inclusion and exchange of views and dialogue, which are essential for engagement between organisations and their stakeholders and mutually productive organisation-public relations.

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